A landscape with a sunset and mountains

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Israel and the Jewish People

Last week: Romans 2 - We are all guilty and deserving of God’s wrath. Even though we don’t deserve the love of God, forgiveness of our sins, and justification through His blood, He offers it to us freely regardless. That’s the “good news” that we preach *to the Jew first and also to the Greek .*

***[ \*Story: Jewish woman, accusing of antisemitism. Who is more Jewish?]***

Paul continues his letter to the church in Rome which is a unique church because it is largely Gentile, unlike many of the other churches which were primarily Jewish. There are, however, still Jews in the church in Rome and he addresses them in this section. It’s possible too, that just like the church in Corinth and in Galatia, there are those who need rebuke and correction.

**Romans 2:17-29 “**Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and boast in God; **18**if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; **19**if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, **20**an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of little children, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth— **21**you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? **22**You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? **23**You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? **24**As it is written: “God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”

**25**Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised. **26**So then, if those who are not circumcised keep the law’s requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised? **27**The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have thewritten code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker.

**28**A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. **29**No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person’s praise is not from other people, but from God.”

In other words, physical attributes are of no value to our faith if those who claim superiority due to their outward and physical distinctions are disobedient to God’s word. Paul is saying that it is a matter of the heart and the Spirit, not physicality. It is a matter of the *“heart, by the Spirit”* (v.29).

This is an important lesson to the church, because those who were Gentile (uncircumcised), seemed to be living out a more obedient faith than those who called themselves Jews because of circumcision. Paul will explain in later chapters that only those who are led by the Spirit are given the “Spirit of adoption”.

Jesus, in his conversation with the Woman at the Well said this;

**John 4:22b-24**“salvation is of the Jews. **23**But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. **24**God *is* Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

God who is Spirit, gives His Spirit, which brings about “sonship” (and daughtership) to all those who come to Him by faith, believing in Jesus, receiving salvation through His atonement, whether they are Jews or Gentiles (or anything else).

So, Paul asks a very important question;

**Romans 3:1-3 “**What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision?

Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, God designates the Jews as His *chosen people*. They are the Israelites who are *given his name*.

He says right after the Aaronic Blessing;

"So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them."

The Jews (a.k.a. Hebrews, Israel) are given the promises of Abraham that were transferred to them through Isaac, and Jacob (Israel).

Those promises included;

1. Decadency (you will be a great nation).

2. Land (you are given the land of Israel.

3. Blessing all the people of the earth (they were given the Messiah).

Paul is asking if there is no longer anything special to God about the Jewish people, now that Gentiles have been welcomed into the fold by faith?

**Romans 3:1-3 “1** What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision?”

*(How do you think he answers his own question?)*

**2“**Much in every way! First of all, the Jews have been entrusted with the very words of God.”

Ok, so yeah, they were entrusted with the words of God. The Hebrew scriptures are where we learn about God’s law, and His commandments. It’s also how we know about who the Messiah is.

But some Jews (*like the woman I mentioned earlier, or some of the people in Israel*) disregard all that and are not faithful to God. Isn’t it true that their unfaithfulness to God and rejection of the Messiah nullifies God’s faithfulness and promises to them, and replaces them with whomever believes in Jesus?

(he asks and answers this question too…)

**3“**What if some were unfaithful? Will their unfaithfulness nullify God’s faithfulness? **4**Not at all!” <>

Not just “no”… *“No, not at all!”*

In Romans 11, Paul continues to ask, and then answer his own questions on this topic;

**Romans 11:1 “**I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For *I myself am an Israelite*, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. **2**God has *not* rejected his people whom he foreknew.”

**11“**So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means!” **29 “…**For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.”

God is the ultimate Promise Keeper. The church hasn’t replaced the Jews OR the land of Israel.

Although He may chastise, rebuke, and discipline His people, and at times He even *temporarily* drove them from their land or withhold blessing, He does not break His everlasting covenant with them.

**Deut. 7:6-8** "For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you and *kept “the oath”* he swore to your forefathers.”

What “oath” is he talking about?

**Psalm 105:8-11**” **8**He remembers his covenant forever,  
    the promise he made, for a thousand generations,  
**9**the covenant he made with Abraham,  
    the oath he swore to Isaac.  
**10**He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree,  
    to Israel as an *everlasting covenant*:  
**11**“To you I will *give the land* of Canaan  
    as the portion you will inherit.”

So does that mean Jews are *automatically saved* because of God’s everlasting covenant with them?

Not at all, and besides along with the covenant came 613 commandments that must be kept, and requirements regarding temple/tabernacle sacrifices that are needed to make atonement for their sins.

Jesus came as Messiah to fulfill the law, and make a once-and-for-all atonement for sin, but all people, Jew and Gentile still need to receive Him by Faith.

But this does not mean that the Jews are no longer God’s chosen people. It just means God’s covenant, oaths, and promises to them as a people are very much still intact.

Jesus did said however, “I am the way and the truth and the life. *No one* comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). That “no one” includes Jews and Gentiles. For a Jew to be saved, he or she must come to God the Father through faith in Jesus the Messiah.   
  
Physical ancestry does not guarantee a spiritual conversion. Even Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, was told by Jesus that he had to be born again, or he would never see the kingdom of God (John 3:1–8).  
  
The apostle Paul emphasized repeatedly in his letters, that we are “saved by grace through faith” and “Justified by Faith”. Abraham is given as a prime example of a man who was justified by faith, apart from the Law (which, when Abraham lived, was not even given yet). We are told in Genesis, Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews that *“Abraham ‘believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’*

This was evident in Jesus’ dealings with Zacchaeus in Jericho. He was a Jewish Tax Collector (not saved). Then one day he encountered Jesus and believed upon him. Jesus said: “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of *Abraham*” ([Luke 19:9](https://www.bibleref.com/Luke/19/Luke-19-9.html)). Zacchaeus’s repentance and faith in Christ made him a true son of Abraham, who is the father of all who have faith;

**Romans 4:11**“And he [Abraham] received circumcision as a sign, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still *uncircumcised*. So then, he is the *father of all who believe* *but have not been circumcised*, in order that righteousness might be credited to them.”

As we read in Romans 2, a person’s physicality and outward observance of the Law does not necessarily mean they have true faith. Salvation is a work of the Spirit in the heart. Only the grace of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, can save anyone.

**Ephesians 2:8–9** “**8**For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— **9**not by works, so that no one can boast.”

This is why we care so much about Jewish evangelism and it is a missions focus of this church. It’s like no other people group, because we are trying to reconnect them with the promises given to their own people through the Hebrew scriptures. Many that they studied in Hebrew school for their Bar/Bat Mitzva.  
  
But what about Israel? It is in the news more than ever before in recent history. The horrific terrorist attack upon its people, and its retaliation has caused the world to explode with opinions, hypothesis, observations, and assessments of the current situation, past history, and the uncertain future of the land and people of Israel.

I’ve complied 5 important points about Israel that are important for every Christian to understand;

Israel holds a special place in the heart of God. This is made evident throughout the entire Bible.

1. **Israel is The Promised Land**

The land of Israel (Ha’aretz) holds enormous Biblical significance, as it was promised to Abraham, then on to Isaac, and then to Jacob and all of their descendants. Throughout the Old Testament, God reaffirms His covenant with the Jewish people, promising them a land of their own.

Christians can appreciate this promise as a testament to God’s faithfulness, recognizing the historical and spiritual connection between the Jewish people and the land of Israel.

**Gen. 17:8** “I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojourning, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”

1. **Israel are ‘God’s chosen people’**

Israel was chosen by God as a nation to fulfill His purposes. The Jewish people have a unique relationship with God, and Christians can acknowledge and honor this divine choice. Christians can recognize the spiritual heritage that has been passed down through generations and the importance of upholding the chosen status of Israel in the eyes of God.

**Deut. 7:6** “For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth.”

**3. The Hebrew roots of Christianity**

To truly understand Christianity, it is crucial to recognize its Jewish roots. Jesus Himself was born into a Jewish family, and all His disciples were Jewish as well. By understanding the Jewish culture and context of Jesus and the early church, Christians can gain a deeper understanding of the Bible and appreciate the rich heritage upon which our faith is built. Without this context the study of scripture is prone to error.

**4. Israel is a modern-day miracle**

The restoration of Israel as a nation in 1948 is nothing short of a modern-day miracle. After centuries of dispersion and persecution throughout the earth, the Jewish people returned to their ancestral homeland against all odds. This restoration can be seen as one of the greatest fulfillments of Biblical prophecy, showcasing God’s faithfulness.

**Ezekiel 36:24** “For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land”

*AB Simpson, predicted this 50 years before Israel was reestablished as a Jewish nation - “Finally, we have to thank God for the marked Jewish movement, which is one of the signs of the times, and which is rapidly peopling the land of Palestine with its own race and preparing the way for the restoration of Israel and the coming of the Lord.” (Christian and Missionary Alliance report 1894)*

**5. Israel faces constant adversity and anti-Semitism**

Israel and Jewish people worldwide constantly face tremendous adversity and threats in the modern world, including increased terrorism and rising anti-Semitism. Every year, there are more hate crimes against Jewish people than any other ethnicity. As Christians, we should stand in solidarity with Israel and the Jewish people, rejecting anti-Semitism and supporting the nation’s right to exist in peace and security. By advocating for Israel, we can contribute to the fight against discrimination and injustice. Standing with Israel also means standing with the Jewish People. This means refuting Replacement Theology, a false teaching that asserts that God has broken His promises to Israel and the Jewish people, no longer cares for them like He did, and has replaced them with the church.

Closing:

We are living in a unique time in history, where many Jewish people are shocked and bewildered. The circumstances in the world have forced them to think a lot about God, eternity, and their understanding of scripture and even prophecy. Although I’m sure many have become bitter and hardened, others have become tenderized and open to conversation and interaction.

*[ \*Jewish friend that reached out for prayer, later posted “The Lord’s Prayer” on his facebook page]*

I believe God wants us to pray and act toward finding ways to bring them the good news of the Gospel of Messiah.

Paul writes about his heart for his own people repeatedly in Romans;

**Romans 9:2-5 “2**I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. **3**For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, **4**the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. **5**Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah.”

**Romans 10:1** “Brothers and sisters, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved.”

**Romans 11:13-16** “**13**I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I take pride in my ministry **14**in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. **15**For if their rejection brought reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

Let’s pray that in these perilous times, we could be used by God to bring the good news of the Messiah the Sar Shalom (prince of peace), to those who are in desperate need of Him.